[117] Chapter 9

Religion, Myths, Cults, Missions

1. Gods

771 The religion of the Barundi is probably best described as animism and totemism, with a generous admixture of elements of fetishism (talisman), manism (worship of the ancestral spirits), and hero cult. The last has already become a cult of gods in many respects. This mixture of elements of the "totemistic era" with those of the "era of heroes and gods" (No. 43, pp. 116, 278) is undoubtedly the result of the mixture of the indigenous Batwa and Bantu with the Hamitic conquerors who added their totemistic clan organization and the cult of their heroes -- who have become tribal gods -- to the clan system, animism, and fetishism of the Batwa and Bantu. All these different social and religious elements have permeated each other, partly by merely existing side by side, partly by merging together and changing, so that it is often difficult to separate out neatly the individual elements and to recognize their origin.

Animism and the belief in demons constitute the main body of the religious concepts of the Barundi. These beliefs are shared by Batwa, Bahutu, and also the Batussi, although the latter to a much smaller extent. Apparently in Urundi as well as in all the rest of the interlacustrine region the Bahima brought with them more refined religious ideas from their original homes in the north. These ideas partly repressed the crude belief in demons and sorcery held by the Bantu Negroes and gave a more important role to ancestor worship. It is true, however, that the large majority of the Bahutu still cling to the old primitive belief in demons and sorcery which conforms so well to their spiritual bent. The Barundi believe that everything is endowed 774 787 with a soul. As among most primitive peoples who are still at the stage of animism, their ideas of an immaterial soul are based on the observed fact that in a sleeping body there exists

316 The industries of Ruanda are very primitive. The country is poor in iron ore, which is hardly to be found except in the Buberuka and Kanage. The Banyarwanda extract it mostly from the Bunyabungu, southwest of Lake Kivu.

[326] They make hoes, spears, billhooks, and rudimentary knives out of it. /55/

285 Basketry is more highly developed, but except for a few small articles made rather artfully by Batutsi women in their leisure time, this industry is not especially remarkable. Workmen and artisans seek to make only what is practical. The making of pottery, as we 323 said before, is almost exclusively the prerogative of the Batwa or the Bayovu, a Muhutu /Bahutu/ clan despised almost as much as the Batwa ethnic group.

462 Women have set tasks as well as men. While they take care of the children, prepare meals, keep the hut orderly and clean, the husband milks the cows and repairs the huts. Furthermore, they are often seen working together in the fields or gathering cereals (1).

1. Grammaire Kirundi /Kirundi Grammar/ by Rev. Fr. Ménard of the White Fathers. Maison-Carrée (Algiers).

What the author says of the Barundi in his preface applies almost in toto to the Banyarwanda. The two lands and the two nations are very much alike. Except for a few small differences, the language is the same.

771 776 From a religious point of view, the Munyarwanda /Banyarwanda/ is extremely superstitious. He acknowledges the existence of a supreme being (Imana), creator of all things, but is not much preoccupied with him in his everyday life because that being does no harm.

769 775 He cares for the ancestral spirits, whom he fears. He believes, indeed, that the spirits of the dead are the authors of the evils that befall him.

of praise nor boasts about his deeds and the number of enemies he has slain. During kichurasi they content themselves with simple clapping (kukoma mukono). People do not wear their better clothing or ornaments. Even the bulls are removed from the herds. All life that has its beginning during this period is regarded as unclean and is killed.

The period of mourning ends with the kichurasi full moon. They begin to beat the drums, very softly and very little on the first day, somewhat more on the second, until on the third day the regular beating is resumed. On the eleventh day the chiefs bring the king presents, get drunk on beer, and sacrifice sterile cows.

The end of the month of kichurasi is celebrated with a great feast for which the nobe gather at court. The feast is called kukura kichurasi. [297] I could not determine whether this feast has any connection with the myth about the redeemer (mutabazi).

This is the time of the great ceremonies of the babandwa and of sacrifices (kuterekera).

The lunar month is divided up according to the phases of the moon. Thus they speak of: imboneko, "emerging moon"; kwezi, "waxing moon"; inzoro, "full moon"; mixima, "waning moon"; imfunda, "disappearing moon." These designations, however, do not correspond to the weeks. The weeks have five to six days and are determined by the relationship of free days to compulsory work days.

[298] Chapter 15

Religion and Related Matters

Ancestor Worship. The religious views of the Banyaruanda do not fit into a compact, harmonious system. This is probably due not only to the low level of development of their religion, but also to the dissimilarity of the Batutsi and Bahutu cultures which have influenced each other.

Ancestor worship is the basis of religious beliefs in Ruanda as well as in the rest of the interlacustrine region.

9:Maquet E-5 (1949-1951) 1961 FO42 Rundi FO42

means (sending a *muzimu* to strangle somebody, acting through lightning or an animal, or using spells).[24]

What was the impact of this frightening world on the everyday life of Ruanda people? It seems that it was not ever-present in their daily lives. The Ruanda considered that most of the events in the human sphere as well as in the material world may be understood without reference to the action of the supernatural world. Some antecedent events or acts were considered as natural causes of the consequent ones. To get a cold at the beginning of the dry or rainy season was considered due to the change of weather. It was known that yaws could be got by contagion. Even death was very often interpreted without any magical explanation. It was expected for instance that people would die because of old age. When beans were sown on poor soil, a bad crop would not mean that the field had been bewitched. Thus when recurrences had been observed or when 'causes' had been discovered in the sphere of physical or human phenomena, events happening according to these recurrences or following their causes were considered as intelligible without any reference to the supernatural world. But when events appeared inexplicable in terms of these natural antecedents or causes, or were attended by some peculiar circumstances, intervention of spirits or sorcerers were suspected and a diviner was consulted. If somebody had tuberculosis and no one among his ascendants or the people with whom he lived had suffered from that disease, it was thought that the cause was a sorcerer. If somebody died from an illness usually considered 'natural', but his death occurred a few days after a theft of which he was the supposed culprit, he was said to have been magically striken at the request of the robbed person.

Even as regards his own death, the individual Ruanda seems to have taken a rather 'secular' view. All our informants agree that to die meant almost exclusively simply to quit life. They believed that they would become *bazimu*, but this left them rather indifferent. To abandon children, cows, fields, and friends was sad for people. But it was accepted without dramatization, as one of those facts which were in the normal order of things.

To sum up, freedom from want, frustrations, and objective fears was far from being achieved in Ruanda. Moreover, supernatural

[24] Cf. Czekanowski, 1917, pp. 302 f.; Arnoux, 1912-13; Pauwels, 1949b; Bourgeois, 1956.